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RELATIONS WITH ROME

By David Phillips

When was the last time you praised and blessed Mary as the handmaid of the Lord? According to the ARCIC report on Mary it is something Scripture leads us to do. You may wonder what version of the Bible might permit this conclusion but it is typical of some of the statements made in both this report and another recent report entitled 'Growing Together in Unity and Mission' both of which are considered below.

The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) established in 1970. After 35 years of work it produced what is apparently its last report on the subject of Mary.

ARCIC ran into the ground because after all those discussions, and Anglican compromise, everyone could see it was not going to resolve the doctrinal differences which were the original target. But also Rome got increasingly jittery about the promotion of immorality in the US Episcopal Church and their fears were not allayed when the Presiding Bishop of the US resigned as co-chairman of ARCIC (it was clearly a masterpiece of the Anglican structures to appoint as its chief representative someone who had virtually no attachment to historic Anglicanism or to Biblical teaching).

But even as ARCIC lay dying in the road a new body had emerged made up almost entirely of Bishops with the snappy name of the 'International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission' (IARCCUM). The remit of this body was quite different to the former. Times have changed and within both fellowships of churches doctrine is being downplayed whilst 'just do it' seems to be the order of the day. The first IARCCUM report, which is really setting the scene for the new way of working, emerged in the early part of 2007 and was far from encouraging.

One or both of these reports is due to be debated by the General Synod in February although at the time of writing it is not clear which. The following is an overview of the two reports, picking up on the approach as well as some of the details.

Mary

(A fuller analysis can be found in *Cross†Way* Issue Summer 2005 No. 97 and on www.churchsociety.org)

ARCIC was an attempt to square the circle, to find a way of reconciling the doctrines of Rome with those of Anglicanism. There are different ways this could be done. Rome could abandon its position, Anglicans can abandon their position (did I hear someone say 'has abandoned'?) or a middle ground can be found that is either a genuine compromise or is so confused that no-one can spot that it doesn't work. ARCIC seems to have tried all these approaches at times but a notable feature of the first five ARCIC reports was that each had to be qualified in some way after the Vatican scrutinised them thus indicating that Rome had no intention of changing its position.

What you would therefore expect to find in the Mary report is an abandonment of Anglican belief, compromise and gobbledegook. Although it is possible that some Roman Catholics are seething about the compromise in the report this has not been apparent and it appears that the compromise is almost entirely one-sided which means it is the same as abandoning Anglican belief.

We began with a quote from paragraph 50 of the report - 'The Scriptures lead us together to praise

and bless Mary as the handmaid of the Lord...' But how can anyone draw this conclusion from Scripture? Mary said 'all generations will call me blessed', she did not say 'all generations will bless me' Luke 1.48. Therefore, this does not represent Anglican belief about Mary because it is not based on Scripture and runs counter to the Scriptural testimony.

Another example is found in paragraph 60 where it states that 'the teaching about Mary in the two definitions of 1854 and 1950 ... understood within the biblical pattern of the economy of grace and hope outlined here, can be said to be consonant with the teaching of the Scriptures and the ancient common traditions'. The two definitions refer to those two occasions when the Papacy has invoked the doctrine of Papal infallibility to assert that certain things must be believed by all. The 1854 definition concerned the immaculate conception (born without sin) and continuing sinlessness of Mary. Again it is hard to imagine how any grown-up theologian could make such a claim. It is doubly concerning when you realize that some of the Anglicans on ARCIC seem unwilling to believe what the Bible clearly teaches but seem prepared to believe blatantly ridiculous statements such as this.

The other feature in the way the report handles Scripture is the way in which it relies on what are essentially hidden meanings in the text - in the way Gnostics used to do. There are statements such as 'a deeper symbolic reading of the event', 'surface reading', 'a symbolic and ecclesial reading', 'implicit here perhaps is a Mary-Eve typology...', 'symbolic and corporate readings' and more. All these demonstrate quite clearly that the plain meaning of Scripture does not support the Roman position, it can only be supported by unwarranted conjecture and by reading meanings into Scripture.

The ARCIC report on Mary really is dreadful and it is to be hoped that if General Synod gets to debate it then it will be given the treatment it deserves.

IARCCUM

(A fuller analysis can be found in Cross†Way Issue Spring 2007 No. 104 and on www.churchsoiety.org)

'Growing Together in Mission and Unity' is the first product of IARCCUM and it is quite a useful report. It is useful first because it does provide a good summary of the ARCIC process and reports.

So for example paragraph 19 states.

Roman Catholics and Anglicans agree that the Eucharist is the effectual sign of koinonia, that the ministry of oversight (episcopate) serves the koinonia, and that a ministry of primacy is a visible link and focus of koinonia. (nb. koinonia = fellowship).

This is one of those ecumenical gobbledegook statements but what it really boils down to is that we should all hold hands and accept the Primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

Likewise it refers to the ARCIC position on the Lord's Supper which really just re-iterates the Roman view:

Before the Eucharistic Prayer, to the question: 'What is that?', the believer answers: 'It is bread'. After the Eucharistic Prayer, to the same question he answers: 'It is truly the body of Christ, the Bread of Life'."

No self-respecting Anglican believes this because it is in flat contradiction to our Articles of Religion. An Anglican believes that we give, take and eat the body and blood of Christ 'after an heavenly and spiritual manner' and that the means by which we do so is faith (Article 28). It is not

the supposed magic performed at the Eucharistic Prayer, but the faith of the person receiving the elements. Again this was a sell-out of Anglicanism and it is simply re-iterated by IARCCUM.

The main focus of the IARCCUM report is not on just looking back but on charting a course forward. This is what makes the report different because a new approach is being tried. Recognising that the doctrinal issues remain unresolved, and that we live in a world that is less bothered with such things, the focus is on shared ministry and mission at the local level. This in fact is recognised in the composition of the bodies. ARCIC was populated mostly by people who were supposed to be heavyweight theologians, clerical and lay. IARCCUM has a greater focus on Bishops.

The report recommends that Anglicans and Roman Catholics should get on and do things together at the local level and of course as such it is not so much setting the agenda but following it. Many churches are already doing the things they suggest and that includes some churches which are supposedly evangelical who apparently believe, in contrast to our forebears, that the doctrinal differences are really not that important.

The joint action includes such things as baptism preparation, attending the Eucharist together (though not taking it), other services, praying for Bishops and the pope, joint study, joint lay training and shared outreach. This latter point is worth noting because it has become increasingly common for evangelicals to get involved in evangelism alongside Roman Catholics begging the question what gospel is being preached? Are people being told that through true faith in Christ they can find forgiveness and be counted righteous, or are they being told that they must be joined to the Church of Rome so that she can help them become righteous either in this life or beyond? This is not the same gospel, nor does it involve the same response to the message preached.

The chief Church of England representative for the ARCIC report on Mary and the IARCCUM reports was Michael Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester.

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